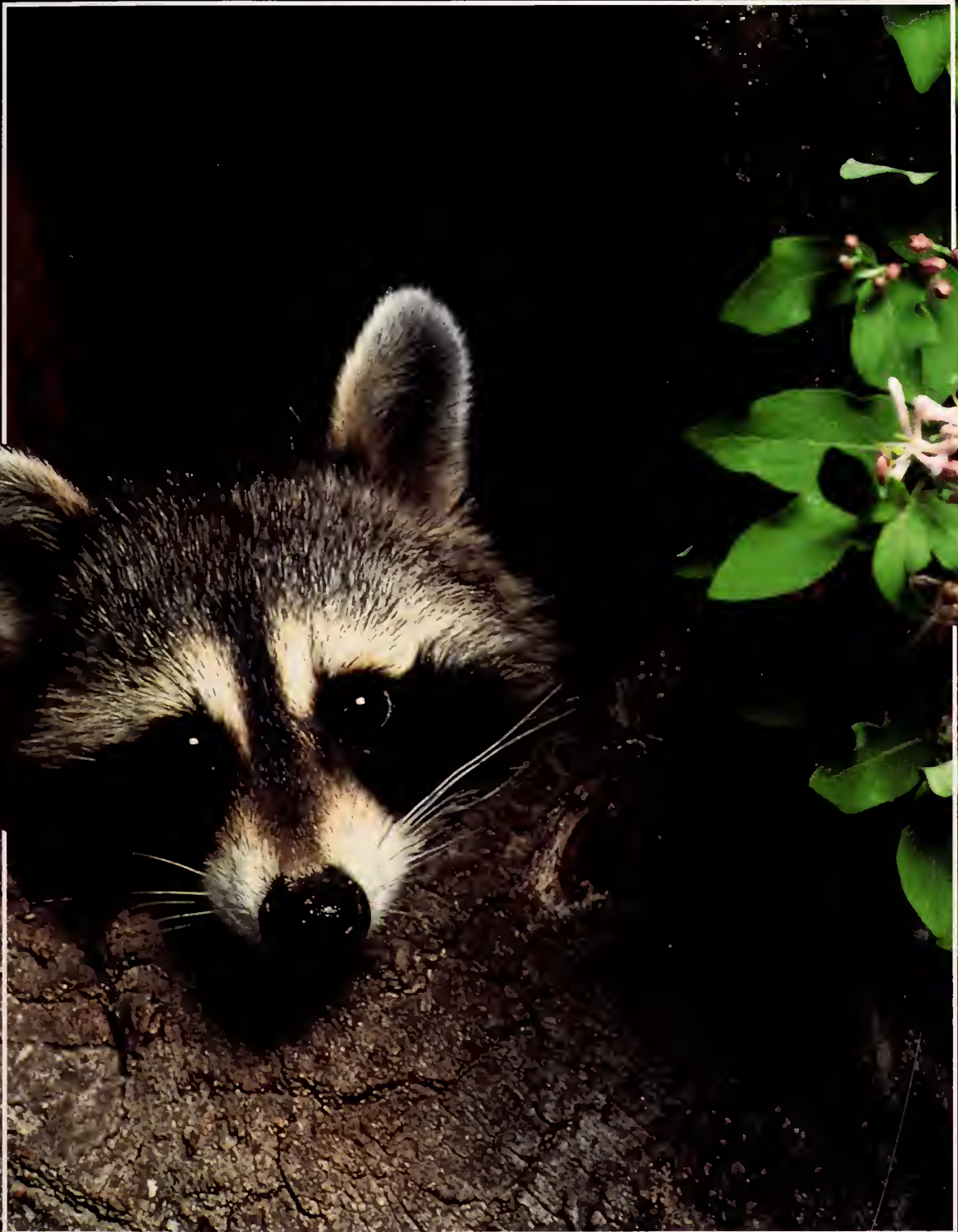


VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

NOVEMBER 2001

TWO DOLLARS





Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

In the short time since we prepared our last issue, our country has witnessed a tragedy of monumental proportion and our lives have been forever changed. Our deepest sympathy goes out to the thousands of people who have been so touched by the events of September 11, 2001. We are truly saddened by the overwhelming grief that is being felt by so many.

All of us have and will continue to spend a lot of our time reflecting on these recent events. And at a time like this, we will search for those things in our lives that bring us comfort. We will hold our loved ones just a little bit tighter and closer, and we will give thanks for the many "little things" that are so special to each and every one of us. We will look for what is right and good with our world and, hopefully, that will help us to sort out this national tragedy.

Even with everything that has created uncertainty in our world, it is still a time for thanks, for giving, and for caring. With that in mind, this

year marks the 10th anniversary of a very special non-profit program called Hunters for the Hungry. Since being formed in 1991, this program has been responsible for more than 1.2 million pounds of venison being donated by hunters, processed, and distributed to food banks and charities throughout Virginia. Their goal this year is to break the 250,000-pound mark. David Horne, Director of Hunters for the Hungry, expressed his gratitude by saying "We are very appreciative of the generosity of Virginia's hunters who have donated this meat, our financial supporters who have provided funds to cover the processing and distribution costs, and the many volunteers who have contributed their time. Our service to the needy is dependent upon the generosity of others and the participation of a wide variety of groups, corporations and individuals." For more information you can call 1-800-352-4868 or visit their web site at www.h4hungry.org. Financial contributions can be



mailed to Hunters for the Hungry, P.O. Box 304, Big Island, Virginia 24526.

I had also planned to talk with you this month about our excellent hunting and fall fishing opportunities and just how fortunate we are to have so many wonderful outdoor experiences awaiting us here in the Commonwealth. But with all that has happened, I will just ask that each and every one of you enjoy your Thanksgiving with family and friends.



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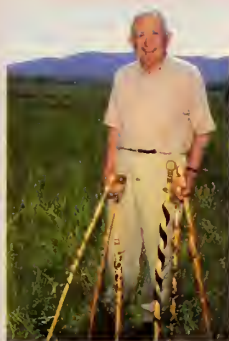
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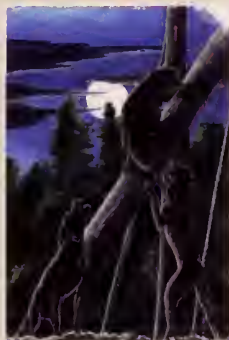
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VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

Cover: The common raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) is found throughout Virginia, it is easily recognized by its long, coarse, grayish coat, black-masked face, and bushy ringed tail. They are excellent climbers and are most active at night. The average density of raccoons found in rural Virginia is one per 13 acres in suitable habitat. Photo © Rob and Ann Simpson

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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

VOLUME 62

NUMBER 11

The "Snake Cane"

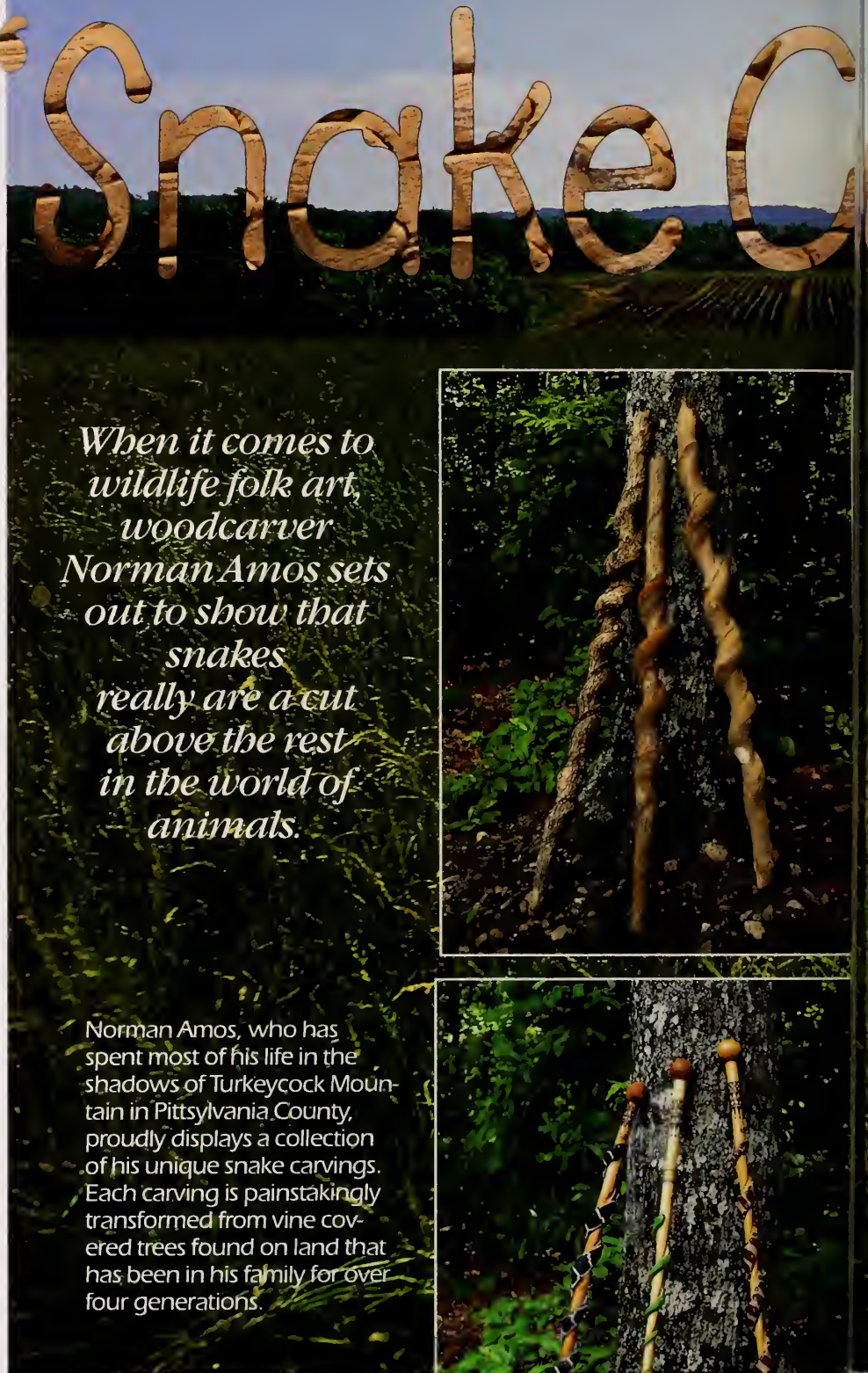
story and photographs
by Lynda Richardson

I watched for a minute to see if it was breathing. I just knew that at any second that shiny black tongue would flicker, its head would raise, and the body contract and stretch as it climbed further up the wooden branch. But there was no movement, and I looked closer at the delicate scales which glistened with life.

Norman Amos stood next to us smiling, watching our reactions. A friendly man with graying hair, Amos was used to looks of surprise and awe. Before us, neatly hanging from a specially designed rack, were over a dozen walking sticks; beautifully carved and intricately painted to look as if "honest to goodness" snakes were crawling up them.

"Snake Canes," as they have come to be known, are Amos's specialty. Collectors from all across the United States, Canada, and England are owners of Amos's unusual folk art, and he almost can't keep up with the demand. His canes have been on display at the Corcoran Museum of Art in Washington, DC, as well as numerous craft and folk art shows. People are clamoring for his work. "Right now, I'm at least six months behind schedule!"

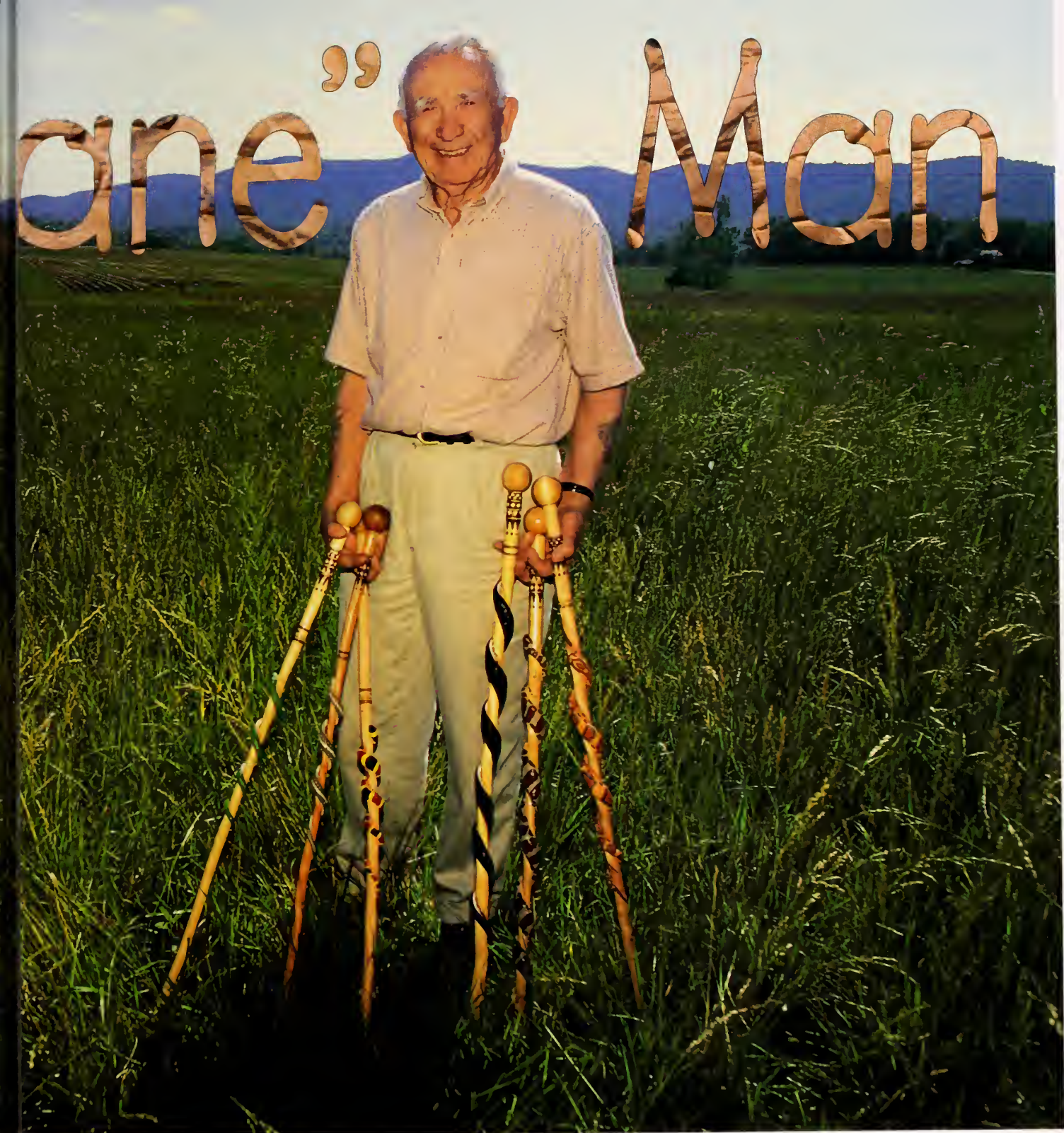
In the shadow of Turkeycock Mountain, amid the rolling farm lands of Pittsylvania County in southern Virginia, Amos sits carving one of his famous canes in a tidy, well tooled, wood carving studio behind his home. Living with his wife, Mavis, on the land of four generations of Amoses, Norman can trace his roots back to the Civil War and to the home his great grandfather built on this land in 1905. Retired from



*When it comes to
wildlife folk art,
woodcarver
Norman Amos sets
out to show that
snakes
really are a cut
above the rest
in the world of
animals.*

Norman Amos, who has spent most of his life in the shadows of Turkeycock Mountain in Pittsylvania County, proudly displays a collection of his unique snake carvings. Each carving is painstakingly transformed from vine covered trees found on land that has been in his family for over four generations.

several years in the Navy during World War II, working as a tobacco farmer on the family farm, and after a long career as a mail carrier in this area, Amos added up 32½ years of government service to his credit. So, when it was time to retire, Amos wanted to relax.



He never dreamed he would be making a good living carving snakes out of wood.

"Whittling," as Amos likes to say, was really a spin-off on his childhood enjoyment of carving. When he was in the second or third grade, he proudly presented his mom with

a small wooden pistol. Two years before she died, she returned the small treasure to him...over 50 years later. Today, it is one of his most prized possessions.

Since elementary school days, Amos whittled away the years carving everything from gun stocks to

picture frames to bears, turtles, monkeys, and bison. But it wasn't until his dad, Lorenzo Amos, came up with a challenge that steered him to carving snakes. One day the senior Amos presented his son with a stick of wood with a vine wrapped around it. "Now take that home and



see what you can do with it," the younger Amos remembers him saying. That stick became Amos' first snake cane; a rattlesnake.

Different snakes lend themselves to different woods, and though Amos has cut into nearly every kind of wood around, sourwood is his favorite. And finding the unusual

vine-coiled sticks isn't as hard as you may think. Once, while walking in the woods around his home hunting for deer, Amos found 12 vine-wrapped sticks in a two acre area. "I missed several good deer shots by cutting down trees!"

Using carefully tempered and sharpened handmade tools, one

snake cane may take anywhere from 60 hours for a small snake to a week and a half for the larger ones.

A snake like the canebrake rattler may have over 4000 scales alone, each individually carved. You can now see why Amos's works of art can fetch upwards of a thousand dollars each.

But, why snakes? Amos laughs, "I



Norman's admiration for snakes enables him to spend countless hours carving. He estimates that it takes over 60 hours to carve and paint one of his snake canes. Insets: The canebrake rattler, one of two rattlesnake species found in Virginia, is especially difficult with more than 4000 individually carved scales.

like snakes. You know, the snake got a bad rap in the Garden of Eden...but the thing about snakes is, if we didn't have snakes we'd be overrun with rats and mice. Snakes do a lot of good! I go around to schools, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and try and teach these kids not to kill every snake they see.

There's no need of killing snakes.

Just look at the canebrake (rattlesnake)! It's just about ready to play out the way they're cutting timber right now."

Amos' goal is to carve a cane of every species of snake in Virginia and present the collection to a museum or organization which will display his work to the public. The

more folks who can see the beauty of snakes, hopefully, the more people will appreciate them. □

Lynda Richardson is a nationally renowned wildlife photographer and longtime contributor to Virginia Wildlife magazine.



Journey Along

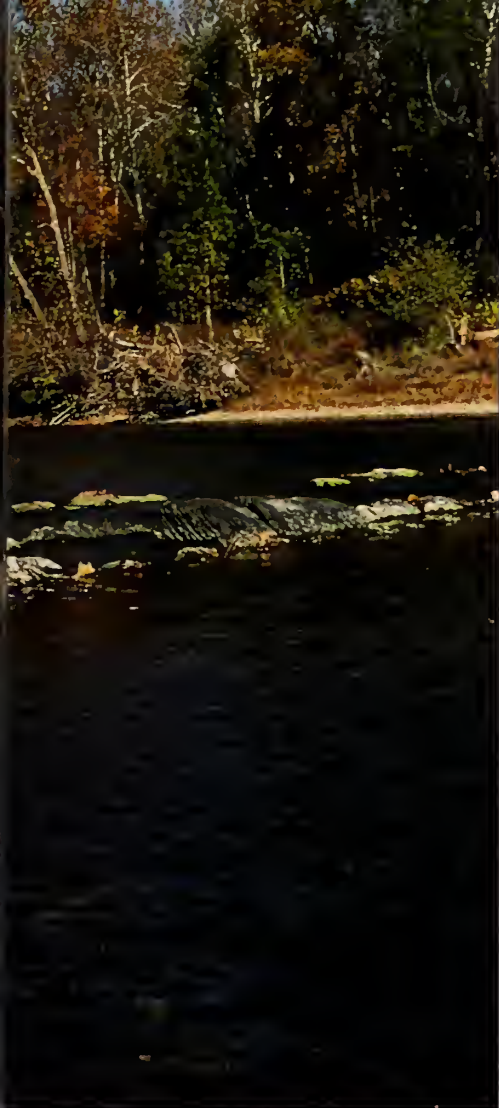
story & photos
by King Montgomery

*Clarke County
is an outdoor oasis
for those who hold
the traditions of
hunting and fishing
close to their heart.*

Places become special to us because of what they offer and the experiences we gather there. Those experiences are often based on the qualities of a place and on the nature of the people we encounter. Both factors have put Clarke County on my personal map recently because of the harvest of riches on and around the Shenandoah River there, and because of

people like Tom "River Hawk" McFillen.

The Shenandoah River has many faces as it courses northeasterly to its marriage with the Potomac River at Harpers Ferry. The North Fork flows west of the Massanutten Mountain, winds through numerous hairpin bends between Edinburg and Strasburg, and ends quietly north of Front Royal, where it joins its larger cousin. The South Fork of the Shenandoah, born of the confluence of the North River and



the South River in Rockingham County, flows lazily down the valley until it accepts the South Fork and becomes the main stem of the Shenandoah River. And here, in Clarke County, it also falls under the watchful eye of Tom McFillen.

Born and raised in the area, Tom McFillen has hunted and fished here for a long time, and watches over the Shenandoah and its riparian zone like a hawk. He believes we can co-exist with nature and, with caution, can reap some of its many benefits without harm. Acting on his beliefs, Tom decided a few years ago to open River Hawk Tours, a fishing guide service designed to share and enjoy all that the Shenandoah River and surrounding environs has to offer. He runs the service from nearby Berryville, county seat of Clarke County about 18 miles west of Leesburg in Northern Virginia.

The River's Bounty

The lower Shenandoah River in Clarke County, like its two tributaries the North and South Forks, has healthy populations of smallmouth bass, some nice largemouth bass, plenty of bluegill and redbreast sunfish, and channel catfish. Above and

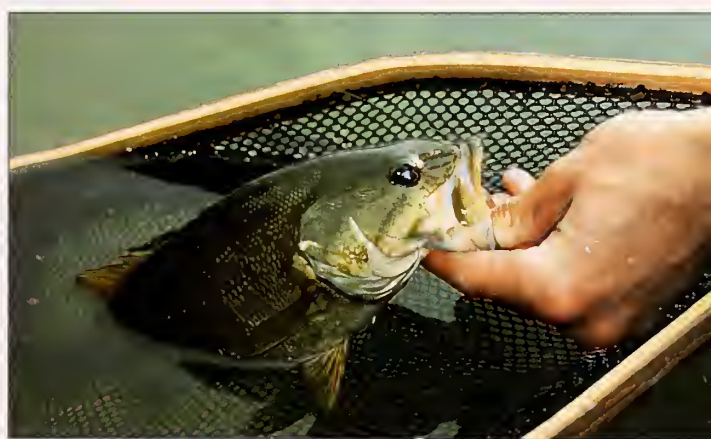
below Warren Dam, near Front Royal, some walleye and muskellunge lurk, mostly in the deeper holes. During the past few years, the fishing for smallmouth bass has been outstanding, with anglers taking both quality and quantity fish. Fisheries biologists with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) credit the strong 1993 year class and more recent spawning successes for the superb angling.

In addition, I believe that some water quality improvement, and the practice of catch-and-release, has contributed to this improved fishing. Selection of and strict adherence to slot limits is also a factor; these are currently 11–14 inches on most of the river, and 14–20 inches on the section of the main stem from Warren Dam downstream to the Route 17/50 bridge. All fish measuring from 14–20 inches must be immediately released, and only one fish over 20 inches may be kept as part of the 5 bass per day creel limit. It's always a good idea to check the current fishing regulations before you wet a line.

Public access and boat launch facilities are located in Front Royal at the Riverton and Morgan's Ford lo-

the River

Above: River-watcher and guide Tom McFillen is a knowledgeable and amiable host from Berryville. He spends a lot of time duck hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching on the main stem of the Shenandoah River. Below: Tom uses a western-style drift boat, which is well suited for catching fish like this smallmouth bass.





Tom McFillen camouflages his drift boat with netting. The boat will serve as a blind for duck and goose hunting.

Royal to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, is under a health advisory for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Eating fish containing PCBs may increase the risk of cancer. Anglers are warned not to eat fish from these waters. (For more information on health advisories here and elsewhere in the Commonwealth, call the Virginia Department of Health at 804-786-1763.)

The River Hawk

Tom McFillen says the Shenan-

cations, and, in Clarke County, at the Highway 17/50 Bridge at Berry's Ford, the Locke's Landing Access at Route 608, and under the Robert W. Smalley Memorial Bridge at Castleman's Ferry (Route 7).

Light tackle and fly anglers can catch fish from early spring to late fall. The hardy can take fish in the winter with live bait or by using bottom-bouncing plastic lures and lead-head jigs. During duck or goose season, you can actually mix a little hunting along with some fishing: shoot geese or ducks when they are around, and fish for smallmouth bass and sunfish when they're not.

I always carry three rods when I fish the Shenandoah. On the light end, I use a fly rod for a 3- or 4-weight line for the numerous and usually accommodating sunfish. Flies used vary from poppers and sliders to streamers and large weighted nymph patterns. For heavier action, I like a fly rod for a 7- or 8-weight line with an assortment of the same flies as above, only in larger sizes for the bigger smallmouth bass. I round out my gear with a 6 or 6½ foot spinning rod with a reel spooled with 10-pound test monofilament line. Poppers, floater-divers, in-line spinners,



lipped and lipless crankbaits, and a selection of plastic worms, grubs, and tubes are all you need.

Cast to shoreline structure, such as rock outcroppings and fallen trees. Work river rocks and ledges, and aquatic vegetation. Look for eddies and current breaks. There are so many great places to cast a lure or fly, and so many hungry species of game fish, you'll have plenty of options and probably plenty of successes.

On a sadder note, although the water quality has generally improved a little, the main stem of the Shenandoah River, from Front

doah River is the perfect place to fish, hunt, sightsee, enjoy nature, watch wildlife, and satisfy the shutter bug in you. It is also a great place to just get away from everyday worries to relax. Tom guides light-tackle anglers in his Clackacraft drift boat, a comfortable and sturdy McKenzie-style boat used on Western rivers. It is perfect for two fly anglers and Tom, who rows from the middle of the boat. Tom likes to lazily float the river, stopping along the way to wade and fish productive spots.

But whether you are fishing or hunting, don't forget to look at the Shenandoah in context—the context

of the riverine community it is. The Shenandoah River, in Clarke County as well as elsewhere, is home to a lot of plants and animals that don't actually live in the water, but do need to be around it. While you're on the water, Tom says you're apt to see white-tailed deer come down for a drink, or wild turkeys scratching for food, or, high overhead, a bald eagle and an osprey dog-fighting for supremacy in the blue skies. You'll be accompanied by some of the hundreds of species of birds that live there, their constant presence



A set of wood duck decoys lure ducks to the area. The combination of shadows, camouflage, and a good rig of decoys are important factors to a successful hunt.

adding to the total package of your experience on the water.

Hunting Along the River

Tom McFillen has been a VDGIF certified Hunter Education instructor since 1986. He believes that guns and other firearms are as safe as the people who use them, and through his experience, he teaches young

and old alike how to handle firearms safely. Gun safety certainly begins at home, with careful cleaning, and storage, but also extends to transportation to the range or to the hunting field, and continues, of course, with proper usage while hunting.

Although he hunts deer, turkey, and other game, Tom likes duck hunting along the Shenandoah River from the early October duck season to the duck and goose seasons later in the fall and into the winter. Wood ducks and blue-winged teal are usually the first to arrive as they migrate through on their way to warmer climes. The resident woody population is also thriving, so in combination with their wild cousins, wood ducks comprise the preponderance of the early duck harvest. By November, other ducks are also available, particularly the ubiquitous mallards whose numbers throughout the country make them one of the most plentiful species.

Clarke County Information

Clarke County, one of the northernmost counties in the Shenandoah Valley, has a population of around 13,000, and Berryville serves as the county seat. The county is mostly rural and unspoiled, with forests, rolling hills, and farm fields stretching for uncluttered miles and miles. It is about 70 miles from Washington, D.C., 45 miles from Dulles National Airport in Northern Virginia, and is easy to access from Interstates 81 and 66. Highways 17, 50, 340, and State Route 7 provide routes to this charming place. Clarke County is perfectly located for a welcome getaway from the hustle and bustle of Northern Virginia.

Clarke County is home to The Virginia State Arboretum at Blandy Farm, the famed Blue Ridge Hunt, one of Virginia's oldest fox hunting clubs, and Holy Cross Abbey with its fine Retreat Center, bakery, and gift shop. Historic houses abound with Long Branch Plantation open to the public for tours, wine, and hot air balloon festivals. The Burwell-Morgan Mill is one of the few oper-

ating, 18th century grist mills in the country, and is open to the public from May through October.

There is a new public golf course along the Shenandoah River, camp grounds, and canoe rentals nearby, and hiking along the Appalachian Trail. Bird and wildlife watchers have a great and varied population of birds and other animals to watch in the mountains, hill, fields, forests, and along the river.

For more information, call the Clarke County Chamber of Commerce at (540) 955-4200 or see their



Web site at www.clarkchamber.com. Their email is info@clarkchamber.com.

Tom McFillen can be reached at (540) 955-2716. See River Hawk Tours' Web site at www.riverhawk-tours.com. It has information on and hyperlinks to additional resources on airplane and balloon rides, caverns, museums, civil war sites, golf courses, parks, vineyards, antiques, lodging, and restaurants. □

King Montgomery is the Mid-Atlantic regional editor for Fly Fish America magazine and a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife. He lives in Annandale.



Remembering Maggy

by Mike Roberts

While catching up on work at home a few evenings ago, I pushed back from my desk piled high with a backlog of other people's expectations long enough to walk outside for a visual embrace of the November night sky. As autumn's first cold front drifted southward, the heavens over Virginia were purged of the usual atmospheric haze, magnifying the radiance of a million shimmering stars. Constellations of bears, wolves, and hunters, so easily recognized as rendered figures on paper, remained hidden from an exhausted imagination. All was peacefully quiet, except for a pair of great horned owls communicating their future plans to claim a vacant red-tailed hawk's nest on the back side of our small farm.

Then, as if to mock the silence, a lone hound struck a hot track a half-mile or more downstream from the property boundary. Almost immediately, two other dogs joined their companion in the chase that took them across several laurel-choked ridges. Predictably, the pursuit was short-lived, coming to an end in a stand of mixed hardwoods that stood in steadfast vigilance over Orrix Creek. Amplified by the still, crisp air, the chaotic bawling quickly changed to a sweet blend of three-part harmony. Somewhere in the darkness a couple of coon hunters were making their way toward the relentless baying. The hounds had treed!

For a brief moment I sided with the raccoon, hoping that the tree

Often it is said that a man's best friend is his dog. That may be true, but while growing up in rural Virginia, an old, red hound meant so much more to me; she was my life. This true story is dedicated to her rightful owner, the greatest man I have ever known—my father, Clyde Andrew Roberts.

chosen in obvious haste was the same hollow one that had provided shelter during several previous winters. Perhaps nature's imperfection now offered emergency refuge, sparing the masked bandit to sport the pack another night.

Envisioned was a young boy holding tightly to his father's hand as they waded a stream reflecting slivers of golden light generated by a spewing lantern. Sympathy for the raccoon evaporated in the excitement of that youngster scrambling out of the water and up the cliff to the base of a giant, leafless oak. Anxiously casting a beam from his flashlight, he caught the glimmer of two eyes glowing like hot coals from a limb high overhead. Even above the

overture of hound music I could hear him shouting, "There he is Daddy, there he is, and he's a big one!"

Slapping the tree and speaking in a language that only coon dogs and coon hunters could interpret, the man coaxed his hounds into a maddening frenzy. After surveying the situation with an over-sized, aluminum flashlight, the man reached into his denim coat pocket and removed a small, tattered box that secured the cartridges so significant to the hunt. Upon chambering a round, he handed the single-shot .22 to his impatient son.

Cautiously, the boy raised the rifle until its forearm came to rest against a leaning sourwood sapling. As he pulled the hammer back, there was sudden awareness of a heart thumping in rapid response to the first-time experience. With final instructions from his father, the youngster aimed and ever so gently touched the trigger.

Snapping back into reality, I listened for the sharp crack of a .22 rim-fire echoing from the ridge crest, but it never came. In all likelihood, a den tree had indeed saved the raccoon's life—this time. Suddenly, a chill raced across my bare arms, sending me back to the comfort of a warm home and the stack of work that was to be ignored until another evening.

Retiring to bed, I knew that sleep would not come easily. Those hounds had unleashed a thousand memories of the dog that had been the best friend a boy could have ever known. Tonight I would again revisit my childhood—remembering Maggy.

The morning Roy Hackworth opened that weathered barn door to show my Dad his hound's week-old litter of puppies seems so awfully long ago. Even in a 50-year fog of forgetfulness, I recall squeezing between the two men for a closer look. There on the plank floor, in a pile of loose straw, was a dozen whining pups squirming about in utter confusion. One by one, Daddy carefully lifted them from their warm bed, only to turn the little fellows upside down for an examination that I failed to question at such a young age. To my delight, Mr. Hackworth agreed to give us a pair after they were weaned—whatever that meant.

As a kid, the weeks of waiting for a first puppy were more suspenseful than a whole year's worth of anticipating Christmas! But, as sure as Santa Claus, so came the day that the pint-sized puppy dogs arrived at our home in a cloth-lined cardboard box. In one way, that was the beginning of my life.

Though the details are somewhat vague, there is recollection of my mother and father discussing potential names for the two new family members. For whatever reason, or the lack of, they were christened Maggy and Trailer. From day one Trailer assumed the dominant role in everything from eating to playing, a trait he would retain for life. In contrast, Maggy was gentle and always eager to participate in whatever activity little boys delighted in. Together we roamed the grassy hills of our pastureland, exploring every nook and cranny along the way. There were daily frolics on the ground that provided opportunity for her relentless face-licking tactics that I so despised, yet resulting in binges of hysterical laughter. We were practically inseparable.

Early on, it became increasingly obvious that Maggy possessed an unbelievable eye-to-mouth coordination. That dog could catch a left-over biscuit regardless of how high it was tossed. In fact, she probably would have been ranked among the world's all-time, top ten biscuit-

catchers, but there was little demand for coon dogs that did anything other than chase raccoons. With the approach of autumn, during Maggy's second year, my father reminded me of her purpose in life, and it had nothing to do with being a boy's pet.

Upon October serving final eviction notice to summer, Maggy's nightly training began without her best friend, who was me! I was too little to tag along, at least that was my mother's reasoning. Whenever Daddy and his trusted neighbor, Lonnie Brown, loaded up the hounds and headed for the woods, I went to bed trying to imagine what

But, as sure as Santa Claus, so came the day that the pint-sized puppy dogs arrived at our home in a cloth-lined cardboard box. In one way, that was the beginning of my life.

that coon hunting business was all about.

Even with a heavy quilt pulled tightly over my head, I would sometimes be awakened in the night by an old Chevrolet truck pulling back into our driveway. All hopes of sleep ended with the clamor of a tailgate slamming against the vehicle's rear bumper, followed by the commotion of growling dogs and both men yelling, "Get back, get back in there!" From that upstairs bedroom I would listen to their conversation for a hint of success, always hoping to hear that Maggy was first to strike the coon's track.

Usually I learned more about the night's hunt at breakfast next morning. Raccoons were scarce in Bedford County during the late 50s, but occasionally the hunters got lucky and there would be a new hide for the smokehouse wall. More often

than not, there was talk of cold trailing, den trees, treed possums, lost dogs and, once in a blue moon, lost hunters.

Just when I thought life was perfect, a big yellow bus turned the world upside down by stopping in our driveway one September morning. With comforting words from Mother, I reluctantly climbed onboard to start my own education. As any faithful dog would have, Maggy was waiting in the yard each day when her playmate returned



©Mike Roberts

from school. That crazy hound was so happy when I stepped off the bus that she would run and jump about frantically, sometimes knocking me to the ground and spilling the contents of my Davy Crockett lunch box.

Somewhere in the confusion of growing up, the wish to go coon hunting was at long last granted. I distinctly remember the weather being unusually warm for fall of the year, which was probably the factor that tipped the scales in my favor. After a short ride down a dusty, gravel road, the hounds were released from the dog-box only to be swallowed up by the dark of night. Before the lanterns could be primed and lit, one of Lonnie's black and

tans hit a smoldering track and the pack was off running. Both hunters whooped and hollered like madmen and I, thinking it the proper thing to do, joined right in. Amidst the melee, Maggy's familiar barks rang out loud and clear, and I was thrilled. This coon hunting stuff was great!

The red-hot chase only lasted a few minutes, and my Dad nodded in agreement when Lonnie remarked that the raccoon was treed. Grabbing a rifle, glowing lanterns,

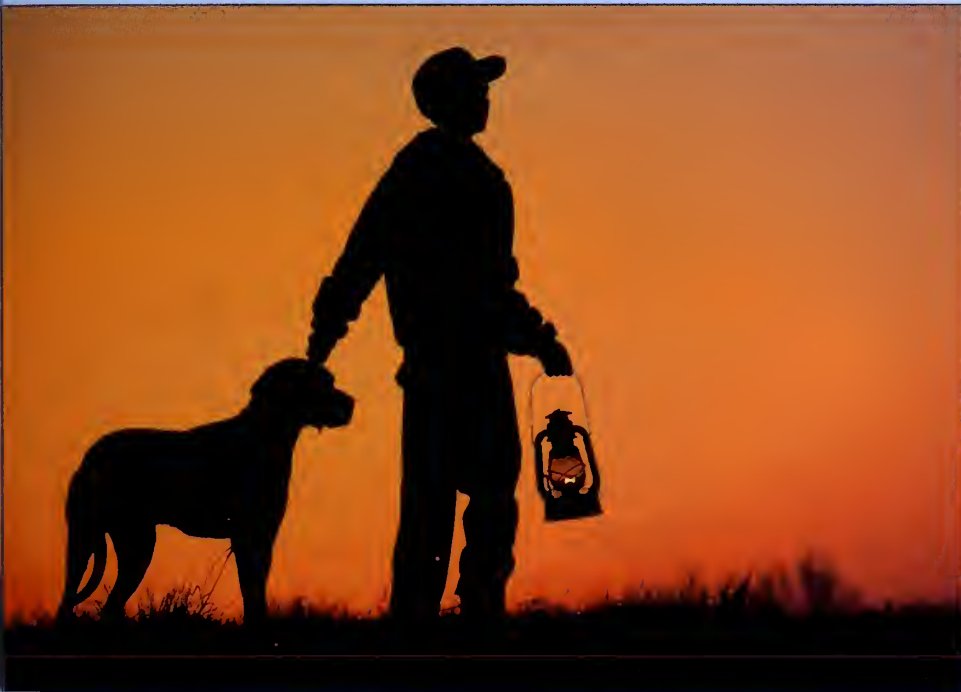
After what seemed like forever, Lonnie spied the animal. Racing over, I got my first glimpse ever of a living raccoon. There, wedged tightly in the fork of a limb, was a ball of black fur sporting a yellow and black ringed tail. All at once the coon stared directly down at me, and that's when I realized that the object of this obsession was something more than a lifeless carcass or skin to be tacked on a wall. Tears raced down my face as I cried out repeatedly, "Goodbye, Mr. Raccoon," all

With fur flying and vicious snarling from dogs and raccoon alike, I wasn't quite sure who was winning the fight. To say that coon was anything less than a gallant warrior would be an understatement, but the odds were stacked too heavily against him. That night I reached a milestone in my life, coming to grips with the fact that death is sometimes an inescapable part of the hunt.

In just a few short years Maggy had become a veteran coon dog, and I now had an eye on Daddy's two firearms. One, a long-barreled, 12-gauge shotgun, was a taped-up, nasty looking thing that frightened me whenever I thought about shooting it. The other, however, was a Model 6 Remington .22—just right for a youngster. That single-shot rifle soon replaced my well-worn Daisy BB and the final piece of the hunting puzzle slipped into place.

On Saturdays and after school, once the leaves fell from the trees, we took out to the woods for gray squirrels. While Maggy had an excellent nose for putting the bushy-tailed rodents up a tree, it was her keen sight that amazed me. Lots of times she would see them before I did, and if a squirrel jumped from tree to tree, as they sometimes did, she maintained visual contact. In all probability, it was those initial biscuit-catching sessions that honed Maggy's special skills to perfection.

One cold Thanksgiving morning we had hunted long and hard with no luck. Finally, in a small block of woods near our neighborhood church, Maggy treed up a tall shagbark hickory. Near the top of the tree was a squirrel that knew all the tricks. Each time I maneuvered around the hickory for a shot, the crafty creature moved to the opposite side. Even the old reliable stick-tossing trick failed. After taking several ill-advised shots, I discovered that my bullet supply was exhausted. That's when I noticed a grapevine growing up the tree. Knowing that squirrels were nervous little critters, I shook the vine and that one came unglued. Running out onto a



©Mike Roberts

and flashlights, the men hurried toward the baying dogs. Taking up the rear, it was all I could do to keep up with their grownup pace. After an exhausting hike, we reached a tree surrounded by howling hounds. Some were trying feverishly to climb the white oak, while others continuously circled about stiff-legged to satisfy themselves that the tree had not been tapped. Then I spotted Maggy sitting on her haunches a few feet from the bottom of the oak, looking up and barking with every breath. No doubt, that raccoon was hiding somewhere aloft.

Turning on their flashlights, Daddy and Lonnie probed the tree for a telltale reflection of red eyes.

Both hunters whooped and hollered like madmen and I, thinking it the proper thing to do, joined right in. Amidst the melee, Maggy's familiar barks rang out loud and clear, and I was thrilled. This coon hunting stuff was great!

the while trying to find some good in the inevitable. Seconds later, a bullet sent the ill-fated creature tumbling earthward.

limb, he attempted to jump into an adjacent tree. Unfortunately for him, there was a slight miscalculation of distance and the helpless animal sailed to the ground. Thanks to Maggy's lightening-quick reaction, I had fried squirrel with biscuits and gravy for dinner that evening.

A year or so later, on Christmas morning, there was a long, beautifully wrapped package lying under our well-decorated cedar with my name neatly printed on the gift tag. After the ribbons and layers of colorful paper were hastily removed that box yielded the gift of all gifts—a brand new J.C. Higgins .22 bolt-action rifle. Now, the Virginia Game Commission's restriction of 75 squirrels per year did not seem as impossible as it once did. The legal limit was a goal that, with Maggy's help, would be accomplished for many hunting seasons to come. Life was good.

While daylight hours were dedicated to squirrels, nights were reserved for raccoons. All the nocturnal rambling that came naturally to Maggy was pure misery for me, but I learned to cope with wet boots and blisters. However, that occasional limb in the face was just cause for questioning the sanity of it all. Often we sat around a lantern waiting for Lonnie's cold-nosed black and tan female to unravel a two-day old track that the other dogs couldn't begin to smell. Once, while selfishly trying to be the first person to the tree, I hung my pants leg on the barbed wire of an over-charged electric fence. Believe me, there was some fancy footwork and squalling going on until Daddy rescued me!

Of the numerous adventures shared with Maggy, only one, if given choice, would be erased from my memory. On that particular night preparation for the hunt was still in progress when the dogs struck and took off lickety-split down the creek. But the men knew the hounds were running something besides a raccoon. How they came to the conclusion of a mink was beyond me.

At first I thought this was a good

thing. My only prior association with these super-sized weasels was an irresistible attraction to the string of glass-eyed, clasped pelts Aunt Marguerite wore draped around her full-length fur coat. In a matter of minutes it became evident that neither of the hunters shared my sentiments. When they got the dogs off that track, a training method was implemented—the likes of which I had never witnessed. Taking great pride in owning hounds that strictly chased raccoons, both men began yelling at the top of their voices. Having never seen my Dad that



©Mike Roberts

upset, it shocked me at first. Then I got angry and began screaming for him to stop. When the ordeal ended, he knew I was furious; there was no talking throughout the course of the hunt or during the long ride home. But, within a few days, my feelings recovered and Maggy thankfully never ran another mink!

With age, Maggy's red muzzle matured to silver gray and I woke up one morning in May knowing how it felt to be 16 years old. My canine partner's stamina was by now somewhat diminished, yet her red-bone-bred enthusiasm was as strong as ever. Friends talked about pretty girls, money, and fast cars, but autumn still meant hunting for the old dog and me.

From the time she was a pup, never once did I consider life without Maggy. That reality hit hard one warm Sunday morning, while standing in the churchyard chatting with a group of relatives. My sister came running, in tears, to tell me that her husband had accidentally hit Maggy while driving to church. This could not be, because she had been road smart through the years. I raced home as fast as possible—praying that it was another dog, or if indeed it was her, for some superficial injury.

Near the gate of our fence, I found my faithful friend lying motionless in the tall grass. Struggling to control the overwhelming flood of emotion, I knelt and softly called her name. Through apparent pain, she rolled those big, brown eyes from side to side as if trying to respond. Moments later there was a final gasp and the suffering ended. Aching inside, I stood and turned to walk home, only to meet Daddy coming toward me. Not one word was spoken as we passed along the edge of the pavement; the sadness in his eyes said it all. Thus was the darkest day of my youth.

Maggy's death marked the end of an unconditional love and the kind of extraordinary relationship that only a boy and his dog could come to know. All that remains of those precious years are a few faded photographs and a treasury of cherished memories to be shared with a grandson when the time is right.

Even though our coon hunting days have long since passed, whenever I see a big one high-tailing it across the road, a long lost passion stirs deep inside my soul. Sometimes at night I hear Maggy barking and sit up in bed, hoping it's not another dream. Thank goodness for great parents, cool October nights, and a little red puppy! ■

Mike Roberts is an outdoor writer and photographer. He is also executive director of Return to Nature, an education outreach program that explores Virginia's natural and wildlife resources. For more information about Return to Nature, call (804) 847-4671.

A scenic photograph of a lake, likely a reservoir, with a forested hill in the background. The foreground is dominated by the branches and leaves of a tree with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and brown. The lake's surface is calm, reflecting the sky and the distant shore. The sky is a pale, clear blue. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and picturesque, capturing the beauty of the fall season.

Public Lakes of the New River Valley District of Virginia



©Dwight Dyke

Enjoy the great outdoors among the many public lakes of the New River Valley District of Virginia.

*Join in the chance
of a lifetime in
the hills of the
New River Valley.*

Southwest of the city of Roanoke, just a short hop off Interstate 81, lie a handful of public lakes. Claytor Lake, the largest, is unique because trophy stripers and hybrid striped bass lurk in its depths. Gatewood and Rural Retreat Lakes offer their own blend of great angling and outdoor scenery. Lovill's Creek Lake, although a little off the beaten track, provides a mixture of frisky game fish as well as solitude and great scenery, aesthetic

qualities often sought by anglers. All four public lakes provide a special diversity of experiences and opportunities for everyone to fully enjoy the great outdoors.

With little stretch of the imagination, these angling opportunities are literally within casting distance of the city of Roanoke. Pack the tackle boxes, dust off those rods and reels; it's time to head for the hills of the New River Valley.

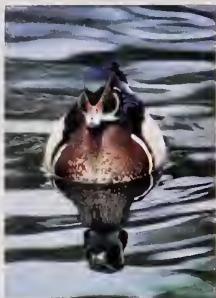
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OUTDOOR CATALOG



*Virginia
Wildlife*

Virginia Wildlife OUTDOOR



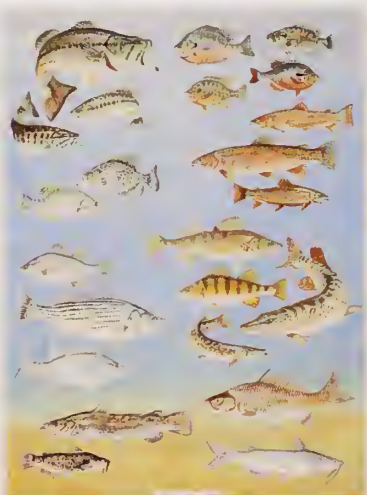
Virginia Wildlife Posters and Print

Freshwater game fish (21" X 36"),
below, wood duck, barred owl, white-
tailed deer (all 19½" X 27½"), left, or
saltwater fish (21¾" X 34") right.
Items VW-1-5. \$8.00 each



VW-1

VW-5



Common Fish
of Virginia



VW-6

Bats of the Eastern
United States (24" X
36"). Includes
information about
each species found
in the eastern United
States. Item VW-6.
\$10.00 each.



Winter Comfort
by
Bob Henley

VW-7

"Winter Comfort" by
Bob Henley, a signed
and numbered limit-
ed edition (950)
print (13" X 19½").
Item VW-7. \$45.00
each.



CATALOG

Hats Off to Virginia Wildlife

The staff of *Virginia Wildlife* is proud to offer Virginia Wildlife caps. Each cap is high quality, 100% cotton and embroidered with the *Virginia Wildlife* magazine logo. One size fits all. We have two attractive styles. Item VW-8 \$15.00 (high profile) or VW-9 \$15.00 (low profile).



low profile
VW-9



high profile
VW-8

ORDER FORM

Item	Description	Price	Quantity	Subtotal
VW-1	Freshwater Game Fish poster	\$8		
VW-2	Wood Duck poster	\$8		
VW-3	Barred Owl poster	\$8		
VW-4	White-tailed Deer poster	\$8		
VW-5	Saltwater Fish poster	\$8		
VW-6	Bats of the Eastern United States poster	\$10		
VW-7	"Winter Comfort" print	\$45		
VW-8	High profile Virginia Wildlife Hat	\$15		
VW-9	Low profile Virginia Wildlife Hat	\$15		
VW-10	VDGIF Belt Buckle	\$15		
VW-11	Pocket Timepiece, Stag	\$95		
VW-12	Pocket Timepiece, Eagle	\$95		
VW-13	Oliver Owl	\$10		
VW-14	Virginia Wildlife Knife	\$75		
VW-15	2001 Commemorative Coin	\$20		
VW-16	Custom Plaque, Walnut	\$30		
VW-17	Custom Plaque, Oak	\$30		

total amount
enclosed

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☐ Visa or ☐ Master Card

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All prices include shipping and handling. Make check payable to Treasurer of Virginia, fill out form, clip and mail to Virginia Wildlife Outdoor Catalog, VDGIF, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Please allow three to four weeks for delivery.



VW-10

VDGIF Belt Buckle

Dress up your ensemble with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries 1916-2000 engraved brass belt buckle. Supplies are limited. Item VW-10 \$15.00

The Collector's Corner

VW-11



VW-12



Pocket Timepiece

VDGIF has teamed up with the American watch company Jules Jurgensen to offer this elegant timepiece. Each watch is crafted with the old world look of a stag or eagle, engraved with a unique serial number, and carries the VDGIF logo on the dial. This timepiece is sure to become a treasured family keepsake.

Item VW-11. (Stag) or VW-12 (Eagle) \$95.00 ea.



VW-13

Oliver Owl

Meet Oliver Owl, the first in a series of collectable wildlife animals. Oliver proudly sports the VDGIF logo, and comes with an introductory card that provides a brief insight into the nature of owls. This is a gift that will surely please children and adults alike. Item VW-13. \$10.00.



VW-14

2001 Limited Edition Virginia Wildlife Knife

The second in a series of limited edition *Virginia Wildlife* knives customized by Scharade Cutlery and made in the USA. Each knife is serial numbered and includes an attractive leather sheath. And in addition, each blade has been etched with original artwork provided by VDGIF's own wildlife artist Spike Knuth. Item VW-14. \$75.00

2001 Commemorative Collector's Coin

This is the first in a series of commemorative collector's coins. Each coin is engraved with the original artwork of a black bear and cub, provided by VDGIF's own wildlife artist, Spike Knuth, and comes in an attractive gift box. Both sides shown. Item VW-15. \$20.00.



VW-15



VW-16



VW-17

Custom Plaques

Display your trophy fish or hunting certificates as well as other awards with this custom plaque. Each plaque contains two medallions commissioned by VDGIF. Plaques are available in both walnut and oak colors.

Item VW-16. \$30.00 (Walnut) or VW-17 (Oak) \$30.00.



Public Lakes of the New River Valley District of Virginia.

©Dwight Dyke

Claytor, Gatewood, Rural Retreat, and Lovill's Creek lakes offer a variety of angling opportunities. Good populations of crappie and largemouth bass can be found in all of the lakes.





©Dwight Dyke

In the heart of the New River Valley and an hour from Roanoke, 4,472-acre Claytor Lake is a very popular destination for anglers, boaters, and campers.

New River Valley District

Lake, Size & Location	Permit Req.	Boat Ramp	Picnic Facil.	Gas Motor	Boat Rental	Handi Facil.	Conces. Facil.	LMB BG	CF	CRP	MY	SMB	WB	SB
Claytor (4,472 ac) Various routes.		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Gatewood (162 ac) Rt. 710 (Mt. Olivet Rd.) west of Pulaski off Rt. 99 N.		•	•		•		•	•	•	•		•		
Rural Retreat (90 ac) I-81 to Rural Retreat (exit 60) to Rt. 90 South. Signs to lake.		•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•			
Lovill's Creek (45 ac) Rt. 52 to Cana, Rt. 686 to lake.		•	•				•	•	•	•				

Key

LMB/BG - Largemouth Bass/Bluegill
CF - Catfish
CRP - Crappie
SB - Striped Bass

NP - Northern Pike
SMB - Smallmouth Bass
WB - White Bass



For more information contact:
VDGIF
2206 S. Main Street, Suite C
Blacksburg, VA 24060
540/951-7923
www.dgif.state.va.us

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

Wild in the Woods

Preparing for Winter's Chill

by Carol Heiser and Sally Mills
illustrations by Spike Knuth



One of the great rewards of seasonal change is the opportunity to watch and learn how wild animals prepare for the coming winter. November in Virginia is an ideal month to spend time outdoors observing the changes unfold, as countless species reveal the behavioral and physiological adaptations they have evolved to cope with cold weather and scant food and cover. As wild animals undergo these annual transformations with great focus and energy, they remind us that we have much in common.

Winged Travelers: Migration

As fall gives way to winter, habitat resources for birds, like food and cover, dwindle throughout much of North America. Insects become inactive or die, or they overwinter in egg sacs or halt development at a particular larval stage. Most fruit and berries that are not eaten fall and rot; many seeds dry up and wither. The quality and quantity of food available to wildlife is, therefore, reduced, the amount of energy needed to keep warm increases, and the days are shorter so there is less time to hunt for food.

Some bird species are able to adjust to these changes and remain in the same environment all year. We call these *resident* species, and they include birds like cardinals, chickadees, and woodpeckers that are easily spotted at our



bird feeders over the winter months. Other species, however, must either change their behavior or their location in order to survive. *Migration* is the seasonal movement of a species to an area of more suitable environmental conditions, and more than one-third of the world's bird species migrate each fall and spring.

Here in the Commonwealth, a temperate climate and proximity to the coast serve the needs of wildlife on the move very well. Because our winters are not too harsh, several species of plants and shrubs thrive year-round and offer up berries, seeds, and cover to many a bird that chooses to overwinter here. Deciduous varieties such as winterberry, bayberry, and wax myrtle provide winter fruit in the form of berries. Evergreens like bearberry, cotoneaster, and catawba rhododendron furnish intricate branching and dense greenery for birds to escape cold winds.

In central and eastern Virginia, rural landscapes offer leftover grain and plenty of edge cover. This is especially beneficial in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, where a dense network of tidal creeks and embayments thrill a wide assortment of waterfowl arriving from points north: green-winged teals, black ducks, mallards, Canada geese, and tundra swans, for example. Food choices include submerged and emergent



Wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*) is a low-growing, evergreen shrub or small tree whose dense foliage provides excellent winter cover. Over 40 bird species, including cardinals and sparrows, eat the waxy berries that mature in late fall.



vegetation, and an array of clams and mussels. Other visitors simply stop-in during their travels south, such as wood ducks, blue-winged teals, and shorebirds like gulls and cormorants that follow fish migrations. Virginia can be likened to a busy airport, where weary travelers arrive from the north while others depart for more southerly destinations.

Adjusting to Cold

Terrestrial-bound animals use other strategies to face winter in Virginia's forests and fields. Box turtles burrow into shallow soil. Reptiles like lizards and snakes seek out the protective cover of rocks and leaf piles or thick mulch. Many other animals hoard stores of food. Deer mice and flying squirrels stash food in tree cavities or under leaf litter; voles cache pounds of leaves, stems, and roots in communal food stores underground.

Most animals also prepare for winter by undergoing successive physiological changes, one of the most crucial of which is the accumulation of body fat, a vital insulator of warmth. Mammals like deer and gray squirrels, for example, feed heavily in the fall on energy-rich acorns and other nuts that help them put on fat beneath the skin. They also gradually replace their sparse summer coat with a thicker, warmer one comprised of a dense layer of soft underfur and a surface layer of many more hollow hairs that trap body heat. These species, as well as the rabbit, otter, muskrat, fox, and bobcat, remain active throughout the winter, foraging or hunting daily. For other species, like opossums and skunks, winter activity is temperature dependent. During extreme cold they may spend much of the time in the safe harbor of a nest, curled up in a semi-sleep state.

Hibernation

Another important adaptation that allows many mammals to successfully endure harsh winter conditions is *hibernation*, a process that is caused by a chemical trigger released by the brain when the animal experiences extremes of temperature, a scarcity of food, or decreasing amounts of daylight. Hibernation is a period of extended rest during which an animal's heart rate, breathing rate, and temperature decrease substantially, even more so than occurs in temporary dormancy. Metabolism slows down, body functions such as urination or defecation cease, and the animal uses much less energy to support its body mass. This more efficient use of energy, in turn, enables the hibernating animal to extend its period of inactivity for several weeks or even months.

The groundhog, or woodchuck, is an example of a true hibernator. This is a medium-sized rodent that spends most of its summer days tunneling and feeding in fields, much to the angst of local farmers. During winter, however, the groundhog burrows underground in one of several tunnels it has dug, where it will hibernate until the soil warms again in late February or early March.

Black bears also undergo a hibernation period, although they are not considered "true" hibernators because their body temperature does not experience as dramatic a decline, and they can wake up several times over winter. Because a hibernating animal is vulnerable to predators, it must find a protected site in which to den for the winter. In fall a black bear will seek out a suitable site, such as between large rocks or inside a brush pile; or, it may use a leafy "den" directly on the forest floor. If avail-



November is peak migration season for tundra swans, which travel by way of North Dakota from their breeding grounds in the Canadian Arctic to their wintering grounds in Virginia and the Carolinas. While wintering-over in area marshes, the swans feast on plant stems and roots, as well as plentiful mollusks and other bivalves. In a classic case of adaptation, tundra swans are seen venturing to nearby farmfields, where they dine upon such delicacies as corn, winter wheat, and soybeans left by the combine.

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is participating with three other states in a tracking study of the tundra swan—Maryland, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania—whose goal is to determine more about breeding locations, winter habitats, and survival rates during migration. To follow their movements go the Department's Web site at: www.dgif.state.va.us.

able, a bear may also choose a hollowed-out trunk or stump to curl up into for a long winter sleep. Although these quarters are often cramped, a female black bear gives birth and nurses her cubs during hibernation in this safe place. Bear hibernation lasts until mid-March or April, but unusually warm temperatures in late winter may prompt bears to emerge early.

Likewise, several bat species like the little brown bat hibernate in caves, mines, or highway tunnels this time of year, in some cases moving several hundred miles between summer roosts and winter shelters. One large summer colony of bats may disperse to several different wintering roosts. Bats choose a hibernation place, called a *hibernaculum*, where the cold temperature is fairly constant and where it is humid, to prevent dehydration.

Both males and females hibernate together, forming winter colonies of a few to several thousand. Within a hibernating colony, bats form loose clusters to keep warm and conserve energy, and it is not unusual for droplets of moisture to condense on their fur.

Contrary to popular opinion, bats—like bears—do not sleep continuously throughout the winter. Instead, their hibernation consists of alternating periods of *arousal* or wakefulness and *torpor* or deep sleep, generally at two-week intervals. Because each arousal uses up a tremendous amount of energy, it is important not to disturb hibernating animals, so they will have enough energy to get through the entire winter. The energy needed to raise the body temperature during these arousal periods comes from a specialized tissue called *brown fat*, stored around the shoulders and back where it can quickly send heat energy to vital organs. Unlike ordinary body fat, which uses the energy released to fuel body processes, brown fat releases energy directly as heat.

Antifreeze in the Blood

Cold-blooded animals like reptiles and amphibians can show remarkable adaptability to extremes of cold as well. The eastern box turtle, for example, can survive complete freezing of up to 58 percent of its total body water for at least three days. Many frogs, such as wood frogs, gray tree frogs, and

Virginia
Naturally

Cockspur hawthorn (*Crataegus crus-galli*) provides thorny cover and safety for many birds. Its round fruit persists into the winter months and are eaten by songbirds and small mammals.





spring peepers exhibit a similar *freeze tolerance*, and several other reptiles and amphibians show actual *freeze resistance*, made possible by a kind of natural “antifreeze” formed in the animals’ cells and tissues. Large stores of glycogen in the liver are converted into glucose (a basic sugar) and glycerol (an alcohol), which circulate throughout the body and bind with water within cells, protecting the cells from freezing and from associated ice damage. Once these cold-blooded animals are thoroughly cooled, they are unable to re-warm themselves using heat generated by internal metabolism. Instead, they must rely on the external rise in temperature of surrounding features like mud and water to warm their bodies during the spring thaw.

Did You Know?

When winter lays a carpet of snow across regions of the state, the ruffed grouse responds

with a nifty adaptation to survive the cold. Grouse will roost in a snow patch as far as 10 inches down, where temperatures can be 40 degrees warmer than at the surface.

Lore

The Canada goose is a symbol of autumn’s arrival in Virginia’s coastal plain. The goose was once revered for its ability to predict the weather and, according to author Laura Martin, an ancient Roman practice of interpreting its breastbone gave rise to the following country verse:

*If the November goose-bone
be thick,
So will the winter weather be;
If the November goose-bone
be thin,
So will the winter weather be.*

A feeding station in your yard that provides water and food, like the black-oil sunflower seeds in this platform feeder, can bring hours of wildlife watching enjoyment on the grayest of winter days.

Learning More...

Look for other interesting facts about how wildlife adapts to the cold in *A Guide to Nature in Winter* by Donald W. Stokes, published by Little Brown and Company. Or, use your web-browser to search for the keyword “hibernation” or the phrase “animals in winter” in quotation marks.

Sally Mills is an outdoor writer and editor for Virginia Sea Grant at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. Carol Heiser is a Wildlife Habitat Education Coordinator at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Whether you walk,
run, bike, or ride
horseback, the New
River and
Virginia Creeper
Trails offer a place
you can really let off
some steam.

by Emily Grey

Cycling has become this writer's mainstay for quickly covering ground and wildlife watching. What better places to enjoy the wholesome outdoors by bike than on the New River and Virginia Creeper Trails, in stunning southwest Virginia.



A Trail Pav



Belted kingfisher, ©Joe McDonald

If you are unfamiliar with these pastoral pathways of history, be prepared to see some of the state's loveliest backcountry. Flashy wildflowers and striking foliage make spring and fall choice seasons to explore these converted railroad beds. A diversity of birds and other wildlife will add to the joy of your outing.

Besides advanced or casual cyclists of different ages, equestrians, joggers, anglers, hikers, and cross-country skiers share these 10–12 feet wide, multi-purpose National Recreation Trails. Stone mileposts mark distances on the relatively flat, easy gradients. I highly recommend riding a mountain or all-terrain bike to negotiate occasional ruts and loose gravel on the cinder and crushed limestone surfaces.

Train replicas lie dormant near certain trailheads. Ample benches and picnic shelters are located at select points. An I-81 overpass on both tracks is an ever-present reminder of interstate commerce and that total wilderness is practically nonexistent.

Myriad trestles of varying length afford wonderful glimpses into the breadth of these paradisiacal landscapes. It is advisable to dismount

when crossing these little bridges. Always yield to horseback riders on any part of the trail and especially on trestles.

Private landowners graciously allow strangers a right-of-way over their properties along sections. To foster good will, it is vital to respect this privilege.



©Emily Grey

Cycling is only one of the family-style outdoor activities that can be enjoyed while visiting the New River and Creeper Trails, which are located in Southwest Virginia.

ed with Good Intentions

Last October, I pedaled both paths and discovered a safe, friendly atmosphere amongst the beautiful wilds. The Virginia Creeper and New River “free” ways are the perfect prescription for escaping the tense outside world.

New River Trail

Within and beyond the borders of New River State Park is a 57.5-mile ribbon-like greenway, which passes

for nearly 40 miles. The tract can be accessed via at least 12 entry points.

In the late 1800s, the Cripple Creek Railroad (later the Norfolk and Western) hauled lead, iron, copper, and other minerals along this route from regional mines to commercial centers. The vein at Austinville, near Foster Falls, is touted as North America’s oldest continuously operated mine.

To my astonishment, the majority of people I encountered hailed from

tiny town of Fries (pronounced Freeze).

A belted kingfisher emitted a rattling monotone while scanning its fishing trajectory. Sprawling farms, meadows, and cattle line the opposite bank. Shimmering leaves and overhanging boughs created idyllic reassurance.

Low, gurgling water slapped numerous, interspersed rocks. Generous precipitation creates whitewater for defiant kayaking. On this quiet,



©Dwight Dyke

©Emily Grey

through a diverse rural, urban, and farm wilderness. This linear strip encompasses rural Grayson, Wythe, Carroll, and Pulaski Counties and the City of Galax.

The New River parallels this abandoned railway

the Carolinas and Tennessee. I wondered how many Virginians have taken the time to visit this coveted natural resource.

Fries to Fries Junction

This 5.5-mile, one-way hop is the wildest and perhaps least discovered leg of the trail.

It begins by the New River in the

A unique feature along the New River Trail is the 75-foot high stone Shot Tower, a National Historical Mechanical Engineering Landmark. It was used during the Civil War to make shot for rifles.

temperate weekday, this enchanting kingdom belonged almost exclusively to wildlife. During five leisurely hours, I encountered only 12 humans.

As I peered through the vegetation, a wondrous spectacle lit the sky. Screeching vociferously, an adult bald eagle, accompanied by an juvenile, flew majestically over the pristine river. The awesome duo quickly disappeared over the eastern hillside. Rangers reported that this same pair may have been sighted a few days earlier near Foster Falls.



©Bill Lee

Chipmunks and red squirrels chattered from the brush. A blue jay sounded its alarm call as I approached its hardwood perch and Fries Junction.

Cliffview to Foster Falls

(You may opt to begin this leg two miles farther south off Route 58).

This 26-mile day trip whisked me



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past a resplendent array of vibrant rolling farmlands, two dams, and over a 1,089-foot, picturesque trestle. At the crossroads of Fries Junction outdoor recreationists conversed, reviewed maps, and rested at picnic tables.

Another refreshing pause was by Chestnut Ridge Falls. There, the Appalachian Trail crossed the rail path and ascended up a delightful umbrella of woodlands.

Two short tunnels added to the mystique of this journey. Cardinals, tufted titmice, and black-capped chickadees darted about the branches of oaks, hemlocks, and pines. A pudgy beaver waddled into the forest.

The invigorating roar of rapids

sounded off a few paces ahead. Soon, the historical emerald village of Foster Falls emerged. A fiery old caboose, railroad depot, saw and gristmill, and iron furnace characterized this mid- to-late 1800s vista. A livery, bike, canoe, and inner tube rentals, shuttle services, a small boat launch, and the state park's administrative offices are also located there. An inviting campground overlooked early morning, sun-painted cliffs.

Entrancing Claytor Lake sparkled like a sapphire amidst a curvaceous ridgeline, brightly colored woods, and attractive homes. Fishermen in search of smallmouth bass and boaters spun about calm, scintillating waters. Rock doves perched high atop the trestle.

Lovely houses, a church, a railroad station, and a snack machine shape the charming community of Allisonia. Snorkelers near this vicinity plunge to the depths of the un-



©Rob & Ann Simms

South of this arena, stood the 75-foot high stone Shot Tower, designated a National Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark. To manufacture uniform shot, slaves dropped molten lead 150 feet down a 75-foot deep shaft of the 200-year-old structure. I eagerly climbed the tower's 77-steps to feast upon the panoramic countryside.

Pulaski to Foster Falls

A group of songbirds called from the shady canopies and underbrush of this 24-mile stretch. Two portly groundhogs scampered inside juxtaposed rock ledges. High, ivy-covered cliffs graced portions of this leg of the trail.

Both trails give hikers, bikers, and horseback riders a chance to travel through tunnels and over bridges. An array of wildlife species, like beaver (above) can be seen along the trail.

usually lucid river to view freshwater sponges, mussels, redbreast sunfish, and other aquatic creatures.

The swooshing song of rapids signaled the proximity of Foster Falls. Anglers, swimmers, and canoeists basked in the splendor of the sun and the salubrious river.

Virginia Creeper Trail

This 34.4-mile long scenic avenue, once an Indian pathway, is also the former lifeline of the early

1900s Virginia-Carolina Railroad or "V-C." This was the sole means of commercial transport of timber from the high mountains to regional valley towns. People called the locomotive the "Virginia Creeper" for its gradual crawl from west to east and perhaps after the vine, which still grows near the track site. The beloved train made its final haul in 1977. Ten years later the former rail passage became the Virginia Creeper Trail.

Members of the Virginia Creeper Trail Club staunchly unite to upkeep and enhance this favorite of America's Rails-to-Trails program. It is the aggregate pride and labor of the Town of Damascus, City of Abingdon, and the United States Forest Service. As of May 2001, there are now 1,109 of these redeveloped abandoned railway corridors in the U.S., with 15 in Virginia.

In contrast to the vast sense of openness of the New River Trail, the Creeper gives a feeling of gentle enclosure. Rivulets, palisades, and residences are consistently closer to the biker.

Both segments of the Creeper are fascinating in different ways. The lofty Whitetop Mountain eastern end is untamed and geologically intriguing compared to the visibly populated western section toward Abingdon. Mount Rogers Recreational Area and the Appalachian Trail border at varying places. Tennessee lies a rock's toss away from the eastern onset.

(Many trail users elect not to travel the final two miles of no man's land just over the North Carolina border).

Whitetop Mountain to Damascus

Near the trailhead is a beaver dam and ridges of thriving Fraser firs on several Christmas tree farms. To the north appears the bald of Whitetop Mountain, Virginia's second tallest summit.

Many riders commence at the eastern end, the highest point at 3600 feet.

The elevation drops to 3200 feet at Green Cove and to 2400 feet at Taylors Valley. These latter two locales offer snack and drink machines and picnic sites.

Nuthatches, warblers, and wrens vocalized from the bushes and hemlocks. A windy stretch of wispy golden leaves carpeted the blackened floor.

Nestled among the rocks, beneath the trestles, and down the slopes are treasure troves of secret places. Baby cascades, shaped par-



©Joe McDonald

tially by sinewy branches, created ideal wildlife watching and listening spots. Beneath the cobbles and boulders of Whitetop Laurel, one of the state's great fishing holes, small to large trout swam about unimpeded.

Several miles down is Green Cove Station, the only original depot on the Creeper Trail. You will weave in and out of national forest land and private domains and cross some busy intersections before encroaching the Town of Damascus, midpoint of the Creeper.

Abingdon to Damascus

Parents pushing strollers, horseback riders, and casual walkers moseyed near each fringe of this most widely used 16-mile section. Huge old oaks, red maples, and yellow poplars accentuated the freshness and glory of this trodden course.

Orchards, pastures, a golf course, and contemporary homes lined the margin. Trail users opened and closed farm gates before cautiously crossing trafficked roadways.

A main attraction along this route is the long trestle where the South and Middle Forks of the Holston River converge. This confluence is an ideal place to look for osprey, mink, or fish.

Farther along is the little community of Alvaredo, the lowest point on the trail at 1,750 feet. There one can detect the thunder of waterfalls.

At the end of this path, in the middle of the Creeper, lies the appealing little Town of Damascus, touted the friendliest in the land. This is an excellent place to sample the cafes, replenish biking supplies, stretch your legs, and visit with the townspeople.

Emily Grey is a naturalist, outdoor writer, photojournalist, and attorney from Virginia's Eastern Shore.

Resources

Mountain Biking the Appalachians, by Lori Finley and Tom Horsch

The Virginia Creeper Trail, by Edward H. Davis and Edward B. Morgan

Virginia Creeper Trail Club
P.O. Box 2382
Abingdon, VA 24212-2382
www.vacreeper.org

New River Trail State Park
(& Shot Tower Historical State Park)
Route 2, Box 126 F
176 Orphanage Dr.
Foster Falls, VA 24360
(804) 786-1712

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
1400 Sixteenth St. NW Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20036
(800) 888-7747 or (202) 331-9698
www.trailink.com



Journal



Gib Brogan

Creel Angler of the Year Recognized

by Julia Dixon Smith

Barry Stafford of Chesapeake has been awarded the first Trophy Fish Creel of the Year Award. This new award, part of the Virginia Angler Recognition Program, honors the angler who catches and registers the most trophy-size fish during the calendar year. The program started January 1, 2000.

This is the first time the Department has singled out one person as the state's top angler for the year. VDGIF offers the Commonwealth's anglers a variety of awards to help them celebrate their fishing experiences including Trophy Fish Awards, Master and Expert Angler Awards, Angler of the Month and Angler of the Year Awards, State Record Awards, and other honors at special events.

Mr. Stafford received the Trophy Fish Creel of the Year Award with a creel that included three different species for a total catch of 33 trophy fish during 2000. The total count included 28 sunfish, 4 yellow perch, and 1 chain pickerel. His sunfish fervor bagged him a total of 37.5 pounds of sunfish for an average weight of 1.3 pounds each. He garnished the scales with a 2 pound 5 ounce sunfish. The yellow perch that were included in the award creel ranged from 1 pound 4 ounces to 1 pound 10 ounces. The chain pickerel measured 25 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches long. Stafford released all but one sunfish.

Barry Stafford's skill at catching trophy-size fish isn't a recently acquired one. Records show that he has been registering fish in the Virginia Angler Recognition Program since 1977. He now claims an impressive 74 registered trophy fish.

For more information on the Creel of the Year Award or any of the other awards of the Virginia Angler Recognition Program go to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Web site at

www.dgif.state.va.us or call 804-367-8916. □

Learn the Basics of Fly-Fishing

If you have ever wanted to learn more about the art of fly-fishing, then here's your chance. Beginning November 3, and every first Saturday of each month—November through March 2, 2002, the Bill Wills Chapter of Trout Unlimited and Federation of Fly Fishers, along with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, will be offering a free, public course in basic fly-fishing. Classes begin at 10:00 a.m. in the activities building located at Northwest River Park, Chesapeake, Virginia. Instructions in casting, fly-tying, and matching your equipment for a more enjoyable fly-fishing experience are just a few of the activities planned.

No registration is required, and participants are encouraged to bring their own equipment. For more information contact VDGIF at (757) 255-2044 or the Northwest River Park at (757) 421-7151. □



RECIPES

by Joan Cone

Planning Your Venison Dinner

Seasonal foods are convenient and economical. Oysters, used together with the cabbage family, blend easily with a citrus fruit salad plus a dessert featuring cranberries.

Menu

Oyster Chowder

*Sweet And Sour Venison Roast
(For crockpot)*

Brussels Sprouts With Sauce

Avocado Mandarin Salad

Cranberry Pecan Tart

Oyster Chowder

- 2 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1 carrot, peeled and diced
- 2 ribs celery, finely diced
- 1 quart whole milk
- 2 to 3 teaspoons diced sweet onion
- Salt to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 4 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1 pint standard oysters, undrained
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley

Boil potatoes, carrots, and celery in a small amount of water until fork tender; drain well. Add next 4 ingredients and bring to a boil; simmer for 3 to 5 minutes. While mixture simmers, cream butter and flour in a small bowl. Gradually add small amounts of the butter-flour mixture to the hot mixture, stirring constantly. Cook until thickened. Add oysters and cook on low heat just until edges of oysters curl. Ladle into bowls and sprinkle with parsley. Serves 4 to 6.

Sweet and Sour Venison Roast (For crockpot)

- 12 small white potatoes, peeled
- 1 boneless venison roast, about 3 pounds

- 1 tablespoon oil
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 can (15 ounces) tomato sauce
- 1/4 cup packed brown sugar
- 2 to 3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar

Place potatoes in crockpot. Brown roast in skillet in hot oil on all sides. Place meat in crockpot. In same skillet, sauté onion until tender. Stir in tomato sauce, brown sugar, Worcestershire sauce, and vinegar. Pour mixture over meat and potatoes. Cover and cook on HIGH for 4 to 5 hours or until meat is tender. Thicken sauce with cornstarch and water. Serves 6.

Brussel Sprouts With Sauce

- 1 1/2 to 2 pounds fresh brussels sprouts, halved
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- Salt to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon ground mustard
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 cup sour cream

Add 1 inch of water and brussels sprouts to a saucepan and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 8 to 10 minutes or until tender. Meanwhile, in another saucepan, sauté onion in butter until tender. Stir in flour, brown sugar, salt, and mustard until blended. Gradually stir in milk. Bring to a boil and boil for 1 minute. Reduce heat and stir in sour cream; heat through. Drain the sprouts, place in a serving bowl and top with sauce. Serves 6 to 8.

Avocado Mandarin Salad

- 1 package (9 to 10 ounces) mixed salad greens

- 1 can (15 ounces) mandarin oranges, well drained
- 1/4 cup walnuts, toasted
- 1/2 cup balsamic vinaigrette dressing
- 2 ripe avocados, seeded, peeled and cut into chunks

In large bowl, combine salad greens, mandarin oranges, and walnuts. In small bowl combine dressing and 1/2 cup avocado cubes. Mash and blend into dressing. Add remaining avocado cubes and dressing to salad. Toss and serve. Serves 4 to 6.

Cranberry Pecan Tart

- 1 package (15 ounces) Pillsbury Refrigerated Pie Crusts

Filling

- 1 cup fresh cranberries
- 1 cup pecan halves
- 1 cup white vanilla chips
- 3 eggs
- 3/4 cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 3/4 cup light corn syrup
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 teaspoon grated orange peel

Place cookie sheet in oven on middle oven rack. Heat oven to 400° F. Prepare pie crust as directed on package for one-crust filled pie using a 10-inch tart pan with removable bottom. Layer cranberries, pecans, and white vanilla chips in crust-lined pan. In large bowl, beat eggs. Add brown sugar, corn syrup, flour, and orange peel; blend well. Pour over cranberry mixture. Bake on cookie sheet at 400° F. for 35 to 45 minutes or until crust is golden brown and filling is set in center. Cover with spray-coated foil after 25 minutes of baking. Cool 2 hours or until completely cooled. If desired, serve with whipped cream or whipped topping. Store in refrigerator. Makes 8 to 10 servings. □



On The Water

by Jim Crosby, Region 4 Boater Education Coordinator

Emergency Towing

If you boat enough, sooner or later you will be involved in an emergency tow. Towing one boat with another is an abnormal practice and, therefore, should be considered an emergency operation.

A reasonable and prudent boat operator should always begin any emergency boat operation by having everyone put on their life jackets—that is everyone in the towboat and the boat being towed. This is just the type of operation that could increase the chances of someone falling overboard and/or getting hurt.

So for everyone's safety, some thought must be given to exactly how the operation will take place. Will your transom, cleats or tow eyes stand up to the torque of the pull? How about the towed boat's attachment point? Will it withstand the pressure? What do you have available to use as a towline and bridal? Proper answers to these questions can reduce the chances of personal injury or property damage resulting from the operation.

Every boat should have tow eyes, cleats and bow eyes that have backing plates to spread the load as a minimum for general boat operations. Something you should check when considering the purchase of a watercraft. This factor has to be measured in light of the size and possible load weight of the vessel to be towed. Tying on to the bow cleat of the boat to be towed could result in pulling a cleat away from your deck or theirs with considerable damage.

Generally, the best attachment

points are the two tow eyes usually found on the stern and the tow eye usually found on the bow of most vessels.

A safe and proper towline should be a minimum of 50 feet in length and of a sufficient diameter to withstand the load. A nylon anchor line is usually a good substitute if it is attached to the anchor with a shackle that can easily be removed. The towline should be attached to a bridal coming off of the towboat to form a Vee the same way you might set up a ski tow. This is important because if you tie a towline straight from the towboat to the towed boat, you will greatly inhibit the steerage of the towing vessel. The bridal is an important part of the hookup to maintain maximum maneuverability and can usually be rigged with one or two dock lines.

Once the bridal has been attached to the towboat and the towline has been attached to the bow eye of the towed vessel, you should connect

the two together with a sheet bend or bowline. Either knot is workable because neither will bind and make the tow rig impossible to take apart. The sheet bend is the very best because it will not slip along the bridal and chafe it. The towline should be long enough to keep the towed vessel from ramming the towing vessel when it must slow down. Towing with a short line is very dangerous.

The next step is to assign a tow watch to be the eyes and ears of the vessel operator who cannot look both forward and backward at the same time.

The last caution is for the vessel operator to remind all passengers to never put any body part between the two vessels, as well as a boat and pier or dock. I know one man who had a finger cut off by a tightening towline and another who broke a leg by using it to fend off a dock collision.

Boat to have fun and be safe—and to be safe, one must be prepared with knowledge and skill. □



©Dwight Dyke

Wild Backyard

by Marlene A. Condon



Goldenrod

Beginning in late summer, goldenrods brighten the countryside with their glowing deep-yellow flowers. Because these native plants can grow up to six feet tall, very few people grow them in their gardens. But you may want to find a field of goldenrods in order to gather seeds (now is the perfect time to collect them) because these plants attract a *huge* diversity of wildlife.

The numerous flowers on each stem produce large quantities of nectar that attract many species of bees and wasps. This nectar is especially important to monarch butterflies that are migrating and, therefore, are particularly in need of nourishment.

Goldenrod pollen is eaten by animals such as soldier beetles—whose

larvae are predators of other insects, including those considered “pests” in the garden (thus helping you to avoid the use of pesticides).

Ambush and assassin bugs, crab spiders, praying mantises, and daddy longlegs seek out meals by preying upon insects that visit for nectar or pollen or by preying upon each other.

During spring and early summer when goldenrod is just beginning to grow new leaves, rabbits and deer may eat this fresh foliage. During winter, American goldfinches and dark-eyed juncos eat the seeds of goldenrod, and downy woodpeckers easily peck a hole into each gall on the stems to pull out the goldenrod gall fly larva within.

Goldenrods will introduce you to

many kinds of animals and they provide a last flush of bright color before winter sets in. Collect some seeds and throw them into a cleared spot in a corner. There no one should object too much to the plants’ unkempt look after they have stopped blooming. You and the wildlife of your area will not regret it!

(*Note: Goldenrod does not cause hayfever.* Any plant that has conspicuous flowers has pollen *too heavy* to be carried on the wind. Such flowers attract insects so that *they* can carry the hefty pollen to other plants of the same species. It is the plants with *inconspicuous* flowers, such as ragweed and grasses, which make lightweight, wind-blown pollen that causes much misery to some folks.) ☐



The locust borer adult eats the nectar and pollen of the goldenrod, while its larvae eat the sapwood of the black locust trees.



The feathery seed plumes of goldenrod attract such seed eating birds as the dark-eyed junco.



Naturally Wild



story and illustration
by Spike Knuth

Ring-Billed Gull

In summer, the laughing gull, with black head and maniacal laughing call, is the dominant gull along Virginia's coastal waterways. But, come fall and winter, most of them move to more southerly climes, and the ring-billed gull comes south to fill the void as it gathers in flocks around Virginia waterways.

The ring-billed gull is regarded as the most common of our continental gulls, along with the herring gull. Audubon referred to it as the "common American gull." A dark ring or band around its yellowish bill near the tip identifies the ringbill. Adult ringbills are pure white on their body and head, with a bluish-gray back or mantle; it has black primary wing feathers marked with white spots. The feet are yellowish-green. In winter, they show dusky spots on the back of the head and neck.

Like other species of gulls, ringbills go through different plumage in each of their first three years. First year birds are heavily marked with brown and a wide tail band edged in white. By their second winter, the primaries start getting blacker and backs become more grayish-blue. By the third year most have acquired full adult plumage.

Ring-billed gulls feed on fish, aquatic insects, and shellfish. Like other gulls, they will drop shellfish on the beach, rocks, roads, or parking lots to try to break them. In some places they've learned to drop them on roads, wait for cars to run over them and crush them, then they quickly devour the exposed meat. They actually help keep our waterways clean by eating carrion—all manner of dead or dying animals, as well as discarded food items by man. Open landfills have provided these gulls with a ready and continued food source. In spring and fall, they follow the farmer's plow feeding on grubs, worms, insects, and even rodents. They will also leave the waterways and go inland to feed on grasshoppers, locusts, crickets, and other terrestrial creatures.

These are the gulls we see congregating on large asphalt parking lots, such as at malls, to loaf, preen, and rest, and also take advantage of discarded hamburgers, pretzels, and other foodstuffs. The asphalt retains the heat from the sun and the gulls take advantage of the man-made, beach-like areas to stay warm on cold days.

Ringbills nest mainly in upper parts of the Great Lakes, James Bay, and marshes and lakes in North Dakota, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. They nest in colonies along with other gulls, terns, and cormorants.

Come September, ring-billed gulls begin meandering southeasterly, and all through the winter they can be found on the Chesapeake Bay, along the larger tidal rivers, and on freshwater reservoirs. □



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